

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

HONOLULU

April 27, 2004

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIONS TO HOUSE BILL NO. 1797

Honorable Members
Twenty-Second Legislature
State of Hawaii

Pursuant to Section 16 of Article III of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii, I am returning herewith, without my approval, House Bill No. 1797, entitled "A Bill for an Act Relating to Optometry."

The purpose of this bill is to allow optometrists to use and prescribe therapeutic pharmaceutical agents, including steroidal agents, for all disorders of the human visual system, to administer injections for anaphylaxis, and to treat glaucoma. Since many serious systemic illnesses affect the eye, the bill would allow optometrists to prescribe a wide range of medications.

This bill is objectionable because it constitutes a significant relaxation of current restrictions and raises health and safety concerns. The training that optometrists receive is less than the rigorous instruction physicians are required to receive to gain prescriptive authority in the State of Hawaii. For example graduates of University of Hawaii's John A. Burns School of Medicine, after four years of extensive medical training, are required to undergo an additional year of residency before they are allowed to independently prescribe medication.

Optometrists are required to complete a four-year degree program and to undergo additional instruction to use and prescribe a restricted class of medications. This bill would remove the restrictions on how optometrists use these medications for the treatment of serious eye diseases, such as corneal ulcers in children, or prolonged eye inflammations.

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Time is of the essence in treating eye infections. If treated inappropriately or belatedly, the result could be severe complications, including blindness. According to the Hawaii Ophthalmological Society (HOS), there are 33 states that do not allow optometrists to prescribe oral steroids, 31 states that prohibit optometrists from prescribing oral anti-fungal medications, 18 states that prohibit optometrists from prescribing oral antibiotics, 27 states that prohibit optometrists from prescribing oral anti-virals, and 22 states that prohibit optometrists from prescribing non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications.

While more narrow modifications of current law with appropriate safeguards might be acceptable, this bill goes too far in deleting the restrictions that have been in place on the use of topical steroidal agents and anti-viral agents. I, therefore, urge ophthalmologists, optometrists, and their respective boards, and the John A. Burns School of Medicine to establish appropriate guidelines for future legislative consideration. Because of the serious health and safety concerns associated with the sweeping relaxation of restrictions proposed by this bill, its enactment would not be in the best interest of the people of Hawaii.

For the foregoing reasons, I am returning House Bill No. 1797 without my approval.

Respectfully,

LINDA LINGLE
Governor of Hawaii